

The Centralized Classification Review Program

Executive Order 11652 of 10 March 1972 declassified all national security classified documents over 30 years old unless they were specifically certified as requiring continued protection by the head of the originating agency or its successor. The Archivist of the United States was given overall responsibility for the systematic review of such records, and agencies of the Executive Branch were directed to develop procedures for implementing action on records over which they had original or final jurisdiction. The basic requirement of systematic review was, and remains, the identification of those documents which contain information still deemed sensitive enough to warrant continued protection. Under the Order, there were only two criteria for such protection: national security sensitivity and the threat of immediate jeopardy to an individual.

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The systematic review program required by Executive Order 11652 developed slowly in the CIA. In response to a request of 11 April 1972 from the Archivist, the DCI designated John Coffey, the then DDS, as the CIA representative to the initial interagency planning meeting held on 28 April at the National Archives. Subsequently, on 20 June 1972, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was officially designated as the CIA focal point officer for dealing with the National archives on declassification matters. A three-man team of CIA annuitants, under contract with the DDO, commenced the review of the records of the OSS Research and Analysis Branch at the National Archives in December 1972. On 3 August 1973, the DDM&S (successor to the DDS), Harold Brownman, proposed establishing a declassification review unit of 15 to implement the requirements of Executive Order 11652. DCI William Colby, who preferred a decentralized program, vetoed the proposal but did subsequently authorize the creation of a five-man Classification Programs Branch (CPB) under the [REDACTED]

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(subsequently reorganized as the Information Systems Analysis Staff - ISAS), one of whose functions was to coordinate the 30-year review program. Shortly thereafter, action was taken to carry out a review of the OSS records retained in Agency custody. OSS maps and motion picture films were reviewed and eventually accessioned by the National Archives. Upon completion of the review of the OSS Research and Analysis Branch Records at the National Archives, the DDO team of annuitants commenced the systematic review of the Agency's holdings of approximately 5,000 cubic feet of OSS operational records. Additional personnel were added to the team, eventually bringing its strength to 15 persons. (At the present, the review of these records is about 40 per cent complete.) In addition, representatives of this team and two staff members of CPB/ISAS were also sent periodically to the National Archives and the Washington National Records Center to review OSS documents in the permanent files of other federal agencies retired there over the years.

By the latter part of 1976, with the Agency's 30th birthday at hand, the question of a systematic review of CIA documents 30 years of age or older had to be confronted. In August 1976, the DDO ordered the creation of a [REDACTED]

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determination to be made was whether the program would be
''centralized'' in a unit drawing from all components (a
course favored by the DDI, DDS&T, and O/DCI area) or ''de-
centralized'' in each component under general ISAS oversight
(a course favored by the DDO and initially by the DDA). After
considerable animated debate, the issue was placed before the
Executive Advisory Group (EAG) on 1 March 1977. After brief
discussion, the EAG unanimously approved the centralized
approach. The upshot of this decision was an Action Plan,
signed by the DDCI on 2 May 1977, which
established a Records Review Branch (RRB) within the ISAS/DDA with
explicit authority for taking final review actions on documents
and information originated by or clearly attributable to the
CIA and its predecessors and on other information over which
the CIA has exclusive or final authority.

The Action Plan envisioned a unit of 40 persons,
recruited Agency-wide. The laborious activities of recruitment,
securing office space and equipment, conducting records sur-
veys, preparing guidelines, and establishing external liaison
were pressed. By the end of 1977, enough administrative spade-
work had been done to begin the regular review of documents.
On 18 November 1977, a ceremony was held in RRB at which the
ADDA, Michael J. Malanick, formally declassified the first
document.

A systematic records review program is a new departure for the CIA. Unlike an FOIA review, which examines a variety of randomly gathered documents in response to an individual request, a systematic review examines documents as parts of complete, organic file units which have been determined to be permanent. The end result of the review is to be an offering to the National Archives, which is the only federal agency legally permitted to make noncurrent, historically valuable records available to public research. For an intelligence organization to undertake such a program is also unique. Information relating to intelligence sources and methodology has always required careful handling, and the DCI is directly charged by law with protecting such information.

The task of analyzing documents for declassification or certification by the DCI as requiring continued protection is both complex and challenging. The analyst must balance protection of intelligence sources and methods with the intent of Executive Order 11652 to make as much information available to the public as possible. Guidelines have been formulated by each Directorate, but inevitably the question of a strict or loose interpretation of the guidelines arises. Frequently, the content of reports and memoranda does not justify continued protection, but the report format may reveal aspects of intelligence sources and methods used by the CIG and the CIA in its infancy. Ever present is the question of what

information is still politically sensitive after 30 years. Such problems have necessitated frequent checking with responsible Directorate authorities and, in one recent case, seeking the views of a foreign government.

When an analyst declassifies a report, he/she is making a judgment that declassification cannot reasonably be expected to cause significant damage to the national security or place a person in immediate jeopardy. An analyst's decision to continue protection is made in the knowledge that the DCI will ultimately certify that decision and that it could be tested in court in the event of legal challenge. Because of the mature judgment required, RRB/ISAS has placed a premium on recruiting senior analysts with wide intelligence experience and analytical ability.

Executive Order 12065, which supersedes Executive Order 11652 effective 1 December 1978, requires a classification review of documents 20 years of age or older. (Information originated by foreign governments does not have to be reviewed, however, until it is 30 years old.) The problems surfaced in the review of 30-year-old documents are viewed as minuscule compared to those envisioned in the review of more recent documents. However, RRB has a good working relationship with the National Archives, and will have the advantage of experience and knowledge gained in its review of older documents.